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LINCOLNSHIRE - A national movement to reopen the famed civil rights-era Mississippi Burning triple homicide case is gaining momentum from a documentary made by students from Adlai Stevenson High School.

Three civil rights workers, Ben Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, were beaten, shot and buried in an earthen dam in Neshoba County, Mississippi, in the summer of 1964 after they were stopped for speeding.

The trio was released from the Neshoba County Jail in Philadelphia, Miss., at about 10 p.m. on June 21, 1964. Weeks later, on Aug. 4, their bodies were found.

The 1988 movie Mississippi Burning was based on the case.

Seven Ku Klux Klan members were convicted of federal civil rights violations in connection with the disappearance of the three young men. No one served more than six years and no one was ever charged with murder.

Momentum for reopening the case has been growing over the past few years. Students of the case in and out of the law enforcement community have said for years that the identities of the killers are well known.

The Stevenson students, Sarah Siegel, 16, of Lincolnshire, Allison Nichols, 15, of Buffalo Grove, and Brittany Saltiel, 15, of Lincolnshire, all juniors, learned about the notorious case for the first time when Stevenson teacher Barry Bradford mentioned it to them as a possible research idea for a project for the National History Fair.

"We hadn't heard about it ... but all three of us said right away we wanted to do that topic," Sarah said. "It isn't just past history. It's something that hasn't had closure. And the victims were just a few years older than us."

The girls, with Bradford's help, made a 15-minute documentary video recounting the homicide, the civil rights background of the tragedy and the aftermath.

Among those interviewed by phone from Mississippi was Edgar Ray "Preacher" Killen, the reputed Neshoba County Klan kingleader in the 1960s. Two other Neshoba County Klan members have claimed Killen coordinated the killings.

The interview is chilling. Killen has always denied he was a Klan member or was involved in the killings. In the interview, he states the civil rights movement in the South, the movement that won voting and other standard American rights for blacks, was "a hoax" to raise money and "recruit young blacks for the Communist Party."

The Stevenson High School documentary won a first place Chicago regional prize in the history contest. ABC television news covered the students' project in June.

The video was brought to the attention of Georgia Congressman John Lewis, a hero of the civil rights battles of the 1960s. Lewis is a sponsor of a resolution in Congress calling for reopening the Freedom Summer murder case.

U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, learned about the documentary. He was the first Republican congressman to co-sponsor the resolution. The resolution is one of several efforts under way to get the case re-opened on the 40th anniversary year of the murders.

Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour, a Republican, and other Mississippi and Neshoba County officials are among those calling for reopening the case.

"There are a lot of people working to get the case reopened," Bradford said. "Relatives of the victims, officials, the publisher of the largest newspaper in Neshoba County ... everyone in Mississippi knows who killed them (the civil rights workers)."

On Sunday, on the eve of the Republican National Convention, the Stevenson students, Bradford, their research and their documentary work will be recognized by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) at a special ceremony at The Museum of the City of New York in Harlem.

Among those expected to take part are Gov. Barbour and Ed Gillespie, chairman of the Republican National Committee. Kirk, who gave the students a special award earlier this month, is to introduce Bradford and the students.